

The Cross Connection

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A beautiful morning of smogginess and mist; and I, a dull looking girl, sitting on my couch, more like an old thoughtful granny though I am just seventeen; quite unexcited for my eighteenth birthday which is tomorrow. People say I'm quite mature for my age, I know not why.

My parents have gone to the market to buy my birthday present, presumably. And here I am, surrounded by the boring, latest technologies as usual.

"Jaco", I called my personal helper. He keeps record of everything I do. "Where's my oxygen mask? I want to out for a walk." He gives it to me and I switch him off so that I could, at least for a day, go out alone in seventeen years. He has been sticking to me since the day I was born. Nowadays parents buy a personal helper before the child is born; and they give them a name together with their child as if two babies have been born. Yes, you heard it right, readers. Jaco isn't a human helper. He is a robot, my personal robot, without whom I can't even imagine being alive for a day. We all have one with us, every time and everywhere; we can't get free from the helper as it keeps a record of what we eat, what we do, how we sleep; it keeps tracking everything and let us know what is good for us or where should we go. And yes, we can't go out if we don't wear an oxygen mask and an oxygen cylinder that is being carried by of course, our helpers. Nobody sticks to us like they do.

In the outside world, I see some humans wearing special suits for oxygen, walking with great struggle. Three humans flying hastily in their air cars. I'm able to count humans here on my fingers because we rarely see any humans outside nowadays. People prefer staying at home as the world we live in is full of risk — lack of oxygen and harmful diseases.

Suddenly I see a small figure of a man coming closer to me. I can't see his face exactly because of smoggy and sooty climate, but the shadow of this man gives a familiar feeling.

"Hello! Lia, Uncle Bruno here. You look dull today!" the shadow whom I have recognised now, says.

"Hey Uncle. I'm kind of bored so..."

"Don't you think today we have lesser smog than yesterday? I can see things at least one metre away from me which I couldn't yesterday. The smoke is much better today," he said while his helper seems to be dusting the dirt from his suit.

"Maybe, Uncle Bruno. Are you going somewhere?" I asked.

"Oh yes, yes. I'm going to the police station, talk to the robot officials regarding your great-great-grandmother's house. They say it is harmful for the present world as it is the only house left with a little plant which just doesn't stop growing, God only knows why. Nobody even lives there now. Who would go and stay in a tiny two-room vulnerable house when we all have our automatic beautiful buildings that include every facility required in today's world? They need my video recording saying, I'm okay with its demolition."

"But is it really okay to see our ancient house being demolished? It is our ancestor's house after all!" I said in quite a disappointed tone which even confused my Uncle.

"Well, Lia! We have got no other option than simply obeying the robot officials. They are handling our country's affairs. And, most importantly, we need a peaceful life with them. We have to agree with whatever they say because... we can't fight with them. How could we? We can't even breathe without an oxygen mask. But they? They are stronger, healthier, can breathe freely in this smoke."

"Alright then, but will you take off that thing too from the house? What is it? The plant thing? Do you have any idea what this thing is? Perhaps it can be a useful thing left by our ancestors for us?" I asked, bewildered.

"I don't know much but I have heard that there was a time when there used to be plenty of plants on this planet though it is quite hard to believe," said Uncle Bruno with his helper constantly staring at him.

A sudden alarm from Uncle Bruno's robot indicates that he's getting late.

"Oh my dear, Lia! I have to go now. My helper won't let me waste a single minute, you see! Take care and please do say my hello to your parents."

I continued my walk on a deserted street, surrounded by buildings everywhere. I have a pair of spectacles specially designed to let humans see clearly in smoky air. I'm unable to see the buildings' top floors because they are too tall. My mobile phone rings, "You have a message, Lia." I realise it has a message from my mother who is waiting for me at home; also worried that I have left my helper there. With a sigh I start moving straight in the direction of my house.

The next morning, as I wake up, I see my birthday presents around my bed: two mini robots and an electronic machine that is made for communication purposes. The machine looks like a huge mirror. It is more like a video call but in a video call, we see the people who we want to talk to but here through this machine we are able to see and talk to a person and also can go inside this mirror-like door straight to that person if we want to. I find this thing the most interesting though some of my friends have it already.

"Now the first call from this would be to my best friend Keni. I'm going to show my birthday present to her," I said excitedly.

I begin to type Keni's full name and address to give her a call; just a few seconds and Keni is there. I see her smiling face. I rush into the mirror-like door to reach her. I don't see my friend's smiling face now. I see darkness. I feel bitterness. I am startled to observe that I can breathe without my mask for the very first time in my life — and experience tranquility, the peace that comes from pure breathing. The gloominess ends and the brightness begins. I have never witnessed such great brightness. I look up and there up in the sky find the store-house of light. I remember studying and looking at the picture of something known as the 'sun'. It looks exactly like that picture. It is so amazing; this light, I can feel it gives me an unexplainable strength.

As I move further, I come across small old-fashioned buildings, some tiny colourful houses and crowds all around. I'm able to push my way through the throng and move forward. Not a single person with oxygen suits, oxygen cylinders or helpers. There are no robots. I have never seen so many people in my eighteen years of life.

I feel everything weird but good. I feel different, I can breathe freely. Perhaps it is just a dream or vision and will disappear as soon as I wake up. Suddenly I see a little girl of around ten or twelve years old playing with a ball in a green coloured place surrounded by wall on all sides.

"Hey! Can you tell me where am I exactly at present? What year? And what country?" I asked her.

She looked astonished, as if I was an alien; especially my dress that must have seemed to her more like that of a clown. She chuckles and retorts, "Were you in hospital or something? You don't remember anything?"

This is quite embarrassing, but I still need her to answer my queries. "Well," she says, "It is 7th of June 2022, and my name is Emma. This is a park and this is a ball. Ball, you know? Children play with it. And, here look up. This is what we call the blue sky and that little bright thing is the sun. These are trees and plants and..."

"Wait, did you say plants? What are those?" I interrupt her.

Almost dying of laughter, she begins explaining, "Plants grow when we put a seed in the soil; the seed grows into a plant which can later grow into a huge tree. They help in having a clearer, healthier and cleaner air which we breathe and this is why they are important. My science teacher says that we must plant a tree if we ever cut a tree. If we don't do this, a time will come when there will be lack of oxygen, sunlight and water; and maybe robots would rule over us and handle the world's affairs. I wonder what would happen to humans then?"

I smiled at her innocence. "Thank you so much for letting me know the importance of plants. There is still hope for my world, my people. The hope that my ancestors wanted me to see on my birthday. My great-great grandmother has chosen me to save my world."

"Are you a runaway patient?" Emma utters with bewilderment.

I smile and say, "You are a sweet kid. Though I was quite jealous of your world initially but now I after the information you have given to me, I realise we have still hope. I am thankful to you too. And, remember never allow your beautiful world to be polluted in such a way that it destroys you."

I walk away leaving the confused kid alone. Then I close both my eyes and say, "My dear great-great grandmother, I know it is you who wanted me to see this world. This cross-connection while calling my friend has taken me to the past and made me understand humans' mistakes. Now you have to take me back to my world too. I have to save the only hope left for our world."

I feel a sudden motion; the light turns into extreme darkness and I'm back to my world of smoke and dust. I immediately wear my oxygen suit and call my helper, "Jaco! We need to save the world. Let's go."

We arrive at my ancestor's house where the demolition seems to be in process. Just when the robot officials are fixing the demolition bombs in every corner of the house, I instantly grab the tiny plant from the ground. "Though I can't save my great-great grandmother's ancient house but I still have a treasure left by her, a hope for a better world, better life and better humans. I'll preserve it forever."

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